

THE POWERHOUSE

by JIMMY POWERS

Negro baseball has had some big days in the two local big league parks, but none figures to compare with the crowd expected to jam Yankee Stadium tonight when the great Leroy (Satchel) Paige puts his gangling feet on the rubber to pitch for the Kansas City Monarchs against the New York Black Yankees.

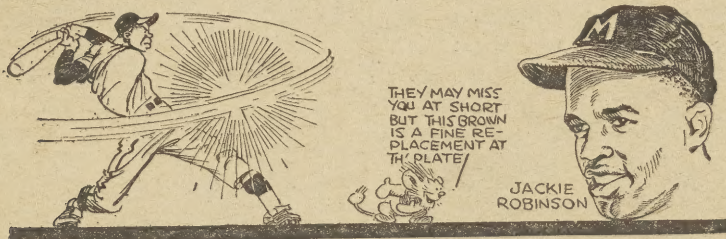
This probably will be the only Negro night game in the city this season as we have a hunch the Yankees and Giants have some sort of a verbal agreement about too many night games. You may remember the New York Cubans played eight night games in the Polo Grounds and drew 55,800 fans last year and the Cubans this season have not been permitted to use the Giant mazdas once.



When Paige pitches, the Negro fans storm out en masse. On July 7, a crowd of 15,000 paid to see him hurl five scoreless frames in the Stadium. The following Sunday he worked five scoreless innings in the Polo Grounds before 18,000 persons, a record for the PG as far as Negro ball is concerned. In between those eight days Paige also hurled three scoreless frames in Shibe Park and another three in Griffith Stadium, making his last Eastern swing a rousing success. He toiled 16 innings in eight days and the enemy had nothing more to show than a string of goose-eggs.

Paige may be 40 but he is as cunning as ever. Talk about Rip Sewell's Blooper Ball! If any of the baseball writers saw Paige's slow one they'd probably call it the Moon over Manhattan. It really goes way up and takes a while before it comes over the plate. He uses the same motion for his fast ball, and even today there aren't more than a dozen major leaguers who can throw a ball faster than Ol' Satchmo.

Paige, one of the most colorful pitchers we have ever seen, imitates no one. He is the first ball player to fly his own plane to exhibitions. He has a two-passenger Cessna, a 1946 model with "Satchel Paige" painted on both sides of the fuselage. His pilot is Dick Wilkinson, former Army captain who was shot down over the Ploesti oil fields on his 27th mission during the recent conflict. Dick is the son of J. L. Wilkinson, co-owner of the Monarchs. J. L. had much to do with bringing Negro ball to our big league parks. His dad is known by most of the major league bosses, as is his partner, Tom Baird who graciously "lost" Jackie Robinson to El Cheapo Rickey's Montreal Royals.



The Monarchs may miss Robinson at short, but they certainly have a fine replacement at the plate in Willard Brown, line-drive hitting center fielder. Brown hit three homers in two games here last trip, his ninth-inning blow with two mates aboard in the Stadium knotting the score, 3-all. The Black Yanks eventually won, 4-3, in 10 frames. The following week Brown belted two four-masters in the Polo Grounds, each coming with two men on base.

Brown is another Negro star the fans will be rooting for tonight. At least 25,000 persons are anticipated by the Negro National League, sponsor of the games. Sunday, they bring to the Stadium the Cleveland Buckeyes, 1945 World Champions, who blasted the Homestead Grays four straight in the Negro World Series last September. The Buckeyes meet the Newark Eagles, Mrs. Effa Manley's first half champions of the Negro National League who had the dubious honor of playing recently before Rickey. El Cheapo has two of Mrs. Manley's stars playing with the Dodgers' Nashua, N. H., farm club in the Class B New England League. Sunday's nightcap pits the Black Yankees against the Memphis Red Sox.

But it's Satch Paige the Negro fans enjoy and they'll be out in huge numbers tonight. And Negro promoters don't give away nylons, put on sideshows or have ladies' nights, yet half the fans they draw are members of the fair sex. Yes, Paige is to baseball what Joe Louis is to boxing. And given half a chance, both put on a great show.

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